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ABSTRACT

This review presents a rationale for teaching Australian teachers to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies, describing the structure and development of the Teaching the Teachers: Indigenous Australian Studies Project of National Significance. The project was designed in response to a government recommendation that all teacher training programs include courses designed to enable student teachers to understand Aboriginal history and Aboriginal viewpoints on social, cultural, and historical matters. The project involved designing, in cooperation with indigenous organizations and community members, universities, education authorities, and professional associations, guidelines for developing a core Indigenous Australian Studies subject, a sample model core Indigenous Australian Studies subject, a teacher-oriented text, and sample resources for preservice primary teacher education courses. The bulk of the project was released and distributed to all Australian schools of teacher education and university Aboriginal education centers. Many universities have found the project materials to be an invaluable resource for helping to foster mutual respect and understanding between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. (Contains 18 references.) (SM)

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TEACHING THE TEACHERS TO UNDERSTAND AND TEACH INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN STUDIES: NEW MODELS, TEACHING STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES TO EMPOWER AND EDUCATE A NATION

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Teaching the Teachers to Understand and Teach Indigenous Australian Studies: New Models, Teaching Strategies and Resources to Empower and Educate a Nation

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The ongoing omission of Aboriginal Studies from Australian teacher education preservice and inservice courses continues to contribute to perpetuating Aboriginal students' educational disadvantage and maintains the vast majority of Australians' ignorance about our shared history. Put simply, this great Australian silence is disempowering both Aboriginal and other Australians to address critical social justice issues of our time. The primary purposes of this descriptive review are to describe: a brief rationale for teaching Australian teachers to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies; the structure and development of the 'Teaching the Teachers: Indigenous Australian Studies' Project of National Significance; new models and resources for structuring Indigenous Australian Studies preservice teacher education courses and developing Aboriginal Studies units of work for the classroom; and the impact of the 'Teaching the Teachers' project on Australian teacher education courses.

Perspectives

The Hughes Report (Hughes, 1988) concluded that "Aborigines remain the most severely educationally disadvantaged people in Australia". Over a decade later this is still the case. The National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People "found that Indigenous people remain the most educationally disadvantaged group in Australia. From preschool to higher education, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples still participate and attain significantly less in education than the rest of the population" (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995, point 18). So severe is this situation, all Australians governments have acknowledged that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples remain the most educationally disadvantaged group in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995, point 77). A recent State Aboriginal Education Policy (NSW Department of Education and Training, 1997) acknowledged "there is an urgent and compelling need to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students to a level comparable with those of the school population generally" (p. 2).

"In the classroom students learn much more than literacy or numeracy. They learn who they are and their location in the social world. The school and the teacher play a major part in the formation of identity and self-esteem...The messages that are received from teachers are vital" (Gilbey, in Partington (ed.), p. 113) as "children need a nurturing environment that promotes a sense of belonging and self-worth" (Corrie & Maloney, in Partington (ed.), 1998, p. 227). As Partington (1998) notes "there is no doubt that massive change is needed in the education of Indigenous students if they are going to succeed in school at the same rates as other students in Australia". This is supported by the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) (1995) who found after surveying 22 primary and secondary schools with significant Aboriginal populations that "schools in general are not successful in recognising and meeting the needs of Aboriginal students". A major problem that can be attributed to the fact that the majority of Australia's teaching service have not experienced appropriate teacher education courses that empower them

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to even understand the needs of Aboriginal students never alone address such needs. As noted by Wilson and Coghlan (1991, p. 65) "The process that has remained the most critical, however, has been the implementation process which we use to educate teachers...most teachers know nothing about Aboriginal cultures; they know nothing about Aboriginal people, and they know nothing about what has been happening to Aboriginal people for the last 200 years, both in terms of 'history', and in terms of what is happening for Aboriginal people today". As Craven (1999, p. 20) notes "it can only be considered a national disgrace that at the dawn of a new millenium this omission of Aboriginal Studies from teacher education preservice and inservice courses continues to contribute to perpetuating Aboriginal students' educational disadvantage and maintains the vast majority of Australians' ignorance about our shared history. Put simply, this great Australian silence is disempowering both Aboriginal and other Australians to address critical social justice issues of our time".

The 'Teaching the Teachers: Indigenous Australian Studies' Project of National Significance (Craven (ed.), 1996a; 1996b; 1999a; Craven, 1996c; 1996d) was funded as a Project of National Significance by the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) over the years 1992-1995 in part response to Recommendation 295 of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Johnston, 1991) which recommended that "all teacher training courses include courses which will enable student teachers to understand that Australia has an Aboriginal history and Aboriginal viewpoints on social, cultural and historical matters, and to teach the curriculum which reflects those matters" (Recommendation 295).

The purpose of the project was to design, in consultation with Indigenous organisations and community members, universities, education authorities and professional associations; guidelines for developing a core Indigenous Australian Studies subject, an example model core Indigenous Australian Studies subject, a teacher-oriented text and sample support resources for preservice primary teacher education courses. Given the diversity of Indigenous Australian cultures, it was neither possible nor appropriate to design a single prescriptive subject for all universities. No such subject could be relevant to the needs of all universities and Indigenous communities. Hence a model core subject was designed as an example, to be adapted, adopted in relevant regions or utilised in part by Australian universities in each State or Territory. The importance of the project has been acknowledged by the Federation of Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups in the foreword to all resources - "The Federation has been fully consulted throughout the development of the 'Teaching the Teachers' project, has supported the aims, rationale and methodology of the project and has endorsed the project materials. It is now up to teacher education institutions to take up the challenge of this model subject ...Accordingly, the Federation recommends the introductory text and support resource materials to all Australian teacher education institutions and teachers (Atkinson in Craven (ed.), 1999, p. ii).

Project Resources

The bulk of the project was released and distributed to all Australian Schools of Teacher Education and University Aboriginal Education Centres by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in May, 1996. Resources developed include:

a) a framework statement (Craven, 1996c) that guidelines based on national consultation to assist universities to get started designing core Indigenous Australian Studies subjects for teacher education courses in consultation with their University Indigenous Education Centres and Indigenous community members;

b) a model core subject manual (Craven (ed.), 1996a; 1996b) that contains: guidelines for using the manual materials; an overview of the purpose of the example subject; and detailed lecture and tutorial notes including example overheads and handouts;

c) a book (Craven, 1996d) designed to assist teachers to avoid inadvertently conveying misconceptions and stereotypes about Aboriginal Australia by considering appropriate and inappropriate terminology;

d) four teacher-oriented videotapes to help teachers: understand the rationale for teaching Aboriginal Studies, debunk enduring misconceptions and stereotypes about Aboriginal Australia, and devise successful classroom teaching strategies; and

e) the book 'Teaching Aboriginal Studies' (Craven (ed.), 1999) which is a resource for teacher education and a practical guide for both new and experienced teachers in primary and secondary schools to assist teachers to begin teaching Aboriginal Studies effectively.

Two important new education models are presented in the Framework Statement. A model depicting a theoretical model of the structure of an example model Indigenous Australian Studies subject for student teachers based on national consultations provides a useful example of one approach to structuring a core Indigenous Australian Studies subject. "The model is based on the premises that in order to appreciate Indigenous cultures and issues today, student teachers need to understand the impact of history on Indigenous Australian societies; and that such content knowledge understandings are prerequisite to being able to teach Indigenous Australian Studies effectively. Each content topic is devised to be presented in terms of present, past and futures perspectives... Understanding the forces that have shaped and impacted on Indigenous societies and issues today is the basis for examining future perspectives in the content of each topic". (Craven, 1996c, p. 11). Also presented, is an innovative model (Craven & Miller, 1996) designed to assist teachers develop appropriate strategies for devising Aboriginal Studies units of work and appropriate teaching activities. The model is useful for both the teaching of Aboriginal Studies and Social Studies in general as it focuses on conceptualising units of work. "The model is based on the premise that in order to appreciate Indigenous culture and issues today, children need to understand the impact of history upon Indigenous Australian societies. Understanding and respect for living cultures and knowledge and appreciation of Indigenous issues forms the basis for planning and shaping future directions" (Craven, 1996c, p. 22).

Project Successes: A Significant Historic Achievement

A number of universities have found the project materials to be "an invaluable resource" (Doherty and Browne, 1996, p. 70). For example teacher educators from the Australian Catholic University noted that:

> The manual "Teaching the Teachers: Indigenous Australian Studies. Model Core Subject Manual" (Craven, 1996) is an extremely valuable resource for tertiary institutions presenting new courses in this subject. Firstly, the comprehensive consultation process with highly regarded members of both the Indigenous and Non-Indigenous community gives the publication authority...it provides a useful model for studying Aboriginal Studies in different contexts across Australia. The manual provides a wealth of information for Teacher Educators. The ideas for lecture formats, tutorial activities and teaching resources are presented in a very well organised and easily accessible format. The inclusion of masters for overhead transparencies is also useful for Teacher Educators. The discussion and presentation of points of contact for Culture Educators and appropriate protocol procedures are also extremely useful for Non-Indigenous Teacher Educators who are teaching future Non-Indigenous Teachers (Doherty and Browne, 1996, p. 70).

In addition, Elton (1998) in summing her evaluation of the implementation of a core course at the Australian Catholic University (Strathfield Campus) concluded that "The majority of the comments from both student evaluations and reflective journals were overwhelmingly positive and indicated great attitudinal changes particularly throughout the development of the unit... most notable was the absence of negative comments particularly from the anonymous evaluations ...Many students were astonished at what they were not taught in their previous education even in courses that they had done in the 1990's".

Project support resources, particularly the videotapes, have been found to be useful in all areas of teacher professional development. There has also been high demand for copies of the terminology book (Craven, 1996d) from education organisations at all levels. For example, some departments of education have incorporated aspects of this terminology list into their Social Studies syllabus and New South Wales Teachers' Federation distributed extracts from the booklet to all of its members in 1997. In addition, universities, Aboriginal Education consultants and Indigenous community groups have utilised the model subject manual resources to inservice teachers across the country.

The 'Teaching the Teachers: Indigenous Australian Studies' Project of National Significance has provided the impetus for more Australian teacher education institutions to begin to recognise their responsibility to prepare student teachers to teach Indigenous Australian Studies effectively. In 1992 only one University in Australia, required student primary teachers to undertake a core Indigenous Australian Studies subject as a compulsory component of preservice teacher education. As a direct result of the

'Teaching the Teachers' project five Australian universities trialed core Indigenous Australian Studies in 1994 and 11 other universities have advised the project team that they have recently introduced core studies into their teacher education curriculum. This is a significant historic achievement in Australian teacher education and a major contribution to the reconciliation process in Australian society.

Summary

"Our nation must have the courage to own the truth, to heal the wounds of its past so that we can move on together at peace with ourselves. And so we take this step: as one part of the nation expresses its sorrow and profoundly regrets the injustices of the past, so the other part accepts the apology and forgives. Our new journey then begins. We must learn our shared history, walk together and grow together to enrich our understanding" (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1999, p. 1).This extract from the Draft Declaration for Reconciliation attests to the need for all Australians to learn our shared history. This simply cannot be achieved without a nation's commitment to educating its preservice and inservice teachers. "The great task ahead is the business of the future - the achievement of reconciliation through education" (Commonwealth of Australia, 1994, p. 3). It is vital that core Aboriginal Studies and appropriate Indigenous perspectives be incorporated in all Australian preservice, postgraduate and inservice teacher education programs. Australia is a far better place than it once was for fostering mutual respect and understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians but it is not as good as it might become. It is hoped that the significant changes in teacher education courses provided impetus by the 'Teaching the Teachers' project will continue until all Australian teacher education courses include a core Aboriginal Studies subject so that all Australian students can experience their right to be taught the shared history of this country and be empowered to address a critical social justice issue of our time.

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